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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [IT](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: ITALY CAUTIOUSLY SUPPORTIVE ON
REQUEST FOR TROOPS

REF: STATE 120807

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Barbara A. Leaf for Reasons
1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Ambassador Thorne delivered Reftel points to Gianni Letta, Chief Undersecretary to PM Berlusconi, on November 24.

Letta took the message on board, and thanked the Ambassador for the heads up on the pending USG decision and "asks" for new resources. Following the NSA Jones discussion with NSA-equivalent Bruno Archi, DCM followed up with Archi to confirm that the "ask" for Italy was 1,500 additional combat troops.

12. (C) Pol M/C delivered the points to FM Frattini's Chief of Staff, Alain Economides and to MOD Political Adviser Alessandro Ruben. Economides (who had been briefed on the Jones-Archi discussion) forebore comment on the particulars of the "ask," saying that it would take "some time" for the GOI to determine its response, but that the GOI would look to "send a political signal of support" for President Obama "soon." Economides underlined that PM Berlusconi hoped to speak to the President, as the GOI wanted to "make the decision in consultation with the U.S."

13. (C) Separately, MOD Advisor Ruben underlined that the GOI was ready to contribute more in Afghanistan, but urgently needed to see the U.S. way forward spelled out in detail so that Italian policymakers could explain any troop increase to the public and Parliament, particularly in light of the recent decision to maintain Italian troop levels in Lebanon at higher than anticipated levels. Ruben pointedly said that Italy had recently done as the U.S. had requested, in keeping troop levels high in Lebanon, despite the planned turnover to Spanish command of UNIFIL and in the absence of a decision by Spain to substantially plus up its troops. He suggested Italy might have to revisit the UNIFIL troop levels in light of any large new demands for Afghanistan. Ruben emphasized that a very large new request (Note: This conversation occurred prior to the Jones-Archi discussion.) would have a substantially better chance of success if accompanied by senior level visits from Washington or, at minimum, a phone call from President Obama to PM Berlusconi.

14. (C) PM Berlusconi, joined by FM Frattini and MinDef La Russa, will meet with NATO SYG Rasmussen at 1700 today. Following a ministerial meeting with Berlusconi at 1300 today to discuss resources for Afghanistan, La Russa advisor Ruben (please strictly protect) called Pol M/C to confirm that the figure now "on the table" before GOI decision-makers was an additional 1,000. He cautioned that there was nothing

certain about this figure as an outcome, that it would be quite difficult for the GOI to afford such an increase and underlined that the final decision would require substantial political pressure (i.e., from the U.S.).

THORNE